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Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5503rd meeting

Monday, 31 July 2006, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. De La Sablière	(France)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. Pereyra Plasencia
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Mlynár
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 31 July 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/596)

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06-45042 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 31 July 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/596)

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Israel and Lebanon, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the members of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Tarek Mitri, Minister of Culture and acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mitri (Lebanon) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting pursuant to the request contained in the letter dated 31 July 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/2006/596.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tarek Mitri, Minister of Culture and acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon.

Mr. Mitri (Lebanon): I have come from Beirut bearing images of horror and sounds of grief, as well as both the anger and the hope of my people. I trust that members of the Council will not see images of what we have seen and turn away, or hear what we have heard and close their ears.

Let me start with a word of appreciation for all the efforts that led to the presidential statement of yesterday (S/PRST/2006/35). I would like to commend your own efforts, Mr. President, but also those of the Secretary-General, whom I join in affirming that the authority and the standing of the Security Council are at stake.

While appreciating the efforts of yesterday, I have come here to reiterate forcefully the call of the Lebanese Government for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire. The onslaught continues unabated. It has to stop.

I have also come to ask for the setting in motion of a process of international investigation with regard to the crime of Qana, Qana the second, where a massacre had taken place in 1996. I am sure that many of us — since many of us here are people of memory — will remember the massacre in 1996 during Operation Grapes of Wrath.

I think that by now, the facts are known to all of us. Dozens of elderly people, disabled people, children and women were sheltering in the basement of an unfinished house. An Israeli jet dropped two bombs, killing 62 persons, including 35 children, who were buried under the rubble.

I left my country mourning and crying out against what all Lebanese — not most Lebanese, I would say, but all Lebanese — perceive to be an unjustified collective punishment — and no collective punishment is justified — that is being imposed on the civilian population. The spilled blood of the children in Qana deserves more, much more, than expressions of regret.

Allow me to say that some of us are tired of listening to a kind of self-righteous discourse about self-defence. We have heard ad nauseam that in wars, mistakes are committed. Indeed. But how many mistakes did Israel commit against my people in 1969, in 1978, in 1982, in 1993, in 1996 and in 1999, and how many mistakes is it committing now? When mistakes are a pattern of behaviour, they deserve another name: they qualify as crimes.

All of us have heard again and again and again the justification given that fighters are in the midst of the civilian population. Let me not argue about that

justification, except to say that it is a blatant violation of international law. Protocol I, of 1977, to the Geneva Conventions states unequivocally in its article 50:

> "The presence within the civilian population of individuals who do not come within the definition of civilians does not deprive the population of its civilian character."

The massacre of Qana is a crime against civilians, no matter what the pretexts are, no matter what justifications are given.

The killing must stop. We have seen previous Israeli aggressions against Lebanon. I think that all members of the Security Council are aware that none of those aggressions achieved their stated aim. The aggression of today should be the end.

Returning to the status quo ante would be futile. And it is because of that that, in the name of the people of Lebanon, I call upon all Security Council members to assist us in putting an end to this human tragedy. The Government of Lebanon firmly believes that that can be achieved in the following manner.

Here, I shall read out a text that was approved by the Council of Ministers, calling for

> "... an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire and a declaration of agreement on the following issues:
>
> "An undertaking to release the Lebanese and Israeli prisoners and detainees through the International Committee of the Red Cross;
>
> "Withdrawal of the Israeli army to behind the Blue Line, and the return of the displaced to their villages;
>
> "A commitment from the Security Council to place the Sheba'a farms and the Kafr Shuba hills under United Nations jurisdiction until border delineation and Lebanese sovereignty over them are fully settled. While in United Nations custody, the area will be accessible to Lebanese property owners there. Further, Israel will surrender all remaining landmine maps in south Lebanon to the United Nations;
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> "The Lebanese Government will extend its authority over its territory through its own legitimate armed forces, such that there will be no weapons or authority other than that of the Lebanese State, as stipulated in the Taif national reconciliation accord;
>
> "The United Nations international force operating in south Lebanon will be supplemented and enhanced in numbers, equipment, mandate and scope of operations as needed in order to undertake urgent humanitarian and relief work and guarantee stability and security in the south so that those who fled their homes can return;
>
> "The United Nations, in cooperation with the relevant parties, will undertake the necessary measures to once again put into effect the Armistice Agreement signed by Lebanon and Israel in 1949 and to ensure adherence to the provisions of that Agreement as well as to explore amendments to, or development of, said provisions as necessary; and
>
> "The international community will commit to support Lebanon on all levels and to assist it in facing the tremendous burden resulting from the human, social and economic tragedy which has afflicted our country, especially in the areas of relief, reconstruction and the rebuilding of the national economy."

I believe that members will agree with me that we owe our people an honourable way out of this war. We owe our people a solution, with the Council's support, that will not allow further destruction and that will help us rebuild our nation — a nation that we have been rebuilding and reconstructing, especially during the past year.

Lebanon, we are often told, has some significance and importance in itself and for itself, for what it represents, for what it is: a country of plurality, diversity and tolerance. Therefore, let it not be the battleground for any war that serves the interests of others. Let not Lebanon be the battleground of the wars of others.

I have come to the Security Council on behalf of the Lebanese Government, hoping to be heard. I have come to cry out loud our nation's right to live and our nation's right to live in dignity. We shall not compromise our just cause as, in a moment like this, we reaffirm our unity as a nation. The Lebanese people, amidst tragedies such as that we saw yesterday, are more united than ever. In that unity, we trust that wars can be overcome. Our country has overcome

many wars and much destruction over the years that I have mentioned, in years prior to that, and over the ages. We shall rise up again.

Let that be the Council's choice, too. It should not allow war, desolation and hatred to prevail.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): As this is your last day as President, Sir, may I express to you once again our appreciation for your very able and fair stewardship during the month of July.

We have heard a very emotional, very eloquent and, I am sure, very candid speech by the representative of Lebanon. I would like to repeat some of the words he said, which I agree with completely and which Israel agrees with completely.

He started by saying that he has come here both in anger and in hope. He continued by saying that we should not return and there should not be a return to the status quo ante. He also said that Lebanon is a country of plurality, diversity and tolerance. He also stated that Lebanon should not and should never again be the battleground of others. He reiterated Lebanon's wish, dream and right to live in dignity, and he repeated that several times.

I want to state emphatically that I agree with each and every one of those statements. Israel has no quarrel with Lebanon. Israel has no battle with Lebanon. Israel has no war with Lebanon.

The Minister repeatedly cited Israel's previous actions against Lebanon. He failed to state why those actions were taken. Israel has never, ever had in its history any claim over Lebanon, neither over its sovereignty nor over its territory nor over its right to exist in our region as a free, vibrant, proud and prosperous State. Israel has repeatedly been compelled to act not against Lebanon, but against the forces and the monstrosity which Lebanon has allowed itself to be taken hostage by. Lebanon has repeatedly, sadly and tragically been taken over time and time again by tyrants in the North — namely, Syria, which still regards Lebanon as Southern Syria, which has never marked its border with Lebanon and which has never even had an embassy in Beirut or allowed Lebanon to have an embassy in Damascus. Lebanon has allowed itself to be taken hostage by terrorists of the worst kind — the Palestine Liberation Organization in the 1980s and Hizbollah in the 1990s.

I ask the Minister in all candidness and in all fairness: When will Lebanon finally take its fate into its own hands? A litany of tragedies and misery does not make for either policy or good politics. Lebanon had several chances to be sovereign, to exert its sovereignty, and to take its fate into its own hands, at least in the past few years. It had one chance over six years ago, when Israel left it completely — a fact that has been ratified by this Council, and in terms of resolution 425 (1978). Lebanon could have made the choice of returning to being the vibrant, beautiful, fun-loving, entrepreneurial and cultured country it was, or of allowing itself to become a hub for terrorism and a launching pad against Israel. Sadly, and tragically for Israel, for the region and for the Lebanese, it chose the latter.

Lebanon had the chance once again after this Council, dramatically and practically without precedent, adopted resolution 1559 (2004) and made the Syrians leave Lebanon, at least partially. Again, there was a chance for Lebanon to exert its sovereignty, to deploy its forces and to rid itself of that monster which it has allowed to take over and to hold it hostage. Once again, Lebanon did not do it.

Why is Israel in Lebanon today? Why is Israel acting against Lebanon? Israel left every single inch of Lebanon. Israel is there only to protect itself against a blatant act of war, the kidnapping of its soldiers and the shelling of its cities and its towns by thousands of rockets, which are only a fraction of the arsenal of death and destruction that Lebanon has allowed to be amassed in the southern part of its territory. Is it not time that Lebanon took its fate into its own hands, rather than keep crying out to the Security Council and to the international community? Is it not time that the Lebanese army, which is there, acted in order to rid itself of the very beast which is bringing this horror and this destruction upon its people?

I truly believe that it is time for Lebanon to act, if for no other reason than at least to prove that it is untrue that, in Lebanon, there is no future and no present — only the past, happening over and over and over again.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Lebanon, who has asked to speak again.

Mr. Mitri (Lebanon): I only want to say that violence has history. There is a genealogy of violence. Injustice breeds violence and violence breeds violence. I cannot but think about some of those children or young people who lost their dear ones in Qana in the massacre of 1996 and who may be tempted to take up arms today. Violence is not an act in one moment of history; violence participates in a cycle and a process, and it is precisely that cycle that we would like to put an end to.

My Government has offered a political framework. I do not think we are ready to hear sermons about what we need to do. We are a Government that has spared no effort with regard to national dialogue and a political process to arrive at a situation in which the State — the central authority — can extend its sovereignty over all its national territory. However, we know that we need the support of the international community, political and otherwise, to achieve that.

I would also like to mention that the conference in Rome, which brought together many States that support or would like to support Lebanon in every respect, issued a presidential statement that referred to Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Implicit in that reference was the fact that resolution 425 (1978) is yet to be implemented fully. We have stated that we need to have the Sheba'a farms returned to us, the release of Lebanese prisoners from Israeli prisons and maps of the landmines in southern Lebanon, which to date we have not received.

Breaking the cycle of violence requires political courage. For our part, we are sparing no effort to open our ears, minds and hearts to constructive proposals, but the points that our Council of Ministers has elaborated unanimously constitute the basis for any political framework to put an end to the present tragic situation. We have come here to reaffirm that a political settlement will bring an end to the violence, but what should precede a political settlement — anywhere in the world, not just in Lebanon — is a ceasefire. No political settlement can be reached while our towns, villages, bridges, houses and shelters are being severely bombarded. A ceasefire is a prelude and a necessary condition for a discussion in the Council of the terms of a political agreement that will put an end to the violence that my country is suffering from and paying the heaviest price for.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of Israel has asked for the floor once again. I give him the floor.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Once again, I must agree with my colleague. He is very right: violence indeed breeds violence. The violence emanating from Lebanon against Israel, after Israel totally vacated and withdrew from every inch of Lebanon, is indeed violence. It cannot be justified; there are no more alibis. When the representative of Lebanon says that his country wants the Sheba'a farms back, he should ask his neighbours, the Syrians, to return them. They claim that the Sheba'a farms are Syrian. We cannot give back something that is not ours. All we know is that the Security Council has declared emphatically, categorically and unequivocally that Israel has left every single millimetre — not inch, but millimetre — of Lebanon. How long can we keep hearing these alibis and excuses for the violence?

Violence is there because Lebanon has allowed violence to take it over. It has allowed a peaceful, fun-loving, entrepreneurial and cultural country to become a hotbed of terrorism and a cesspool of hatred. When those children are incited the way they are, do not expect them to grow up any other way. Those children do not need Qana in order to hate us. All they have to do is to read the textbooks from which Hizbollah teaches them, and to hear the sermons they hear in their places of teaching and prayer. They do not need any further incentive. I believe that no baby is born wanting to be a suicide bomber, and no mother gives birth to a child wanting him to become a shahid. But if that is the kind of culture they grow up in, indeed violence breeds violence.

The President (*spoke in French*): Minister Mitri has asked for the floor once again. I very willingly give him the floor, in the hope that the interesting discussion we are listening to very carefully will conclude with the dignity in which it began.

Mr. Mitri (Lebanon): I think I have said all I wanted to say. I think hatred is not in anybody's genes. Hatred is not in our culture, nor in anyone's culture. This war will breed hatred, as it breeds despair, aggravates frustration and produces the sense of being dispossessed and humiliated. There is a history to this — a history of injustice. I am sure all the members of the Council know what history I am talking about.

As to resolution 425 (1978), I was quoting the Rome presidential statement to suggest that it is not just Lebanon that has been assertive of the need to be given back the Sheba'a farms, the Lebanese prisoners and the maps of the landmines in southern Lebanon. There is a greater understanding on the part of the international community concerning those legitimate requests. I think meeting such legitimate requests is part of any honourable political solution.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

In accordance with the understanding reached earlier, I invite the members of the Council to proceed to informal consultations following the adjournment of this meeting.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.